Mirror of the Mind How Culture Shapes Self-Esteem

What if someone told you that the way you see yourself was shaped long before you began to recognise yourself in the mirror? You might not agree right away, but the statement contains some truth.

How Your Culture Defines You

The culture in which you were born and raised has a far greater influence on your self-esteem than you realise. Culture has become so ingrained in our lives that we no longer see it as a separate entity. Rajeshwari Luther, a psychologist at Hope Trust, who offers online services for worldwide clients, says: “culture is important because it bears upon what all people bring (to the clinical setting”. An individual is both made up of and shaped by culture. As a result, it is inextricably linked to discussions of identity and self-esteem.

Why “Us” Shapes “I”

Given the vast influence of culture on each individual, it is understandable that everyone uniquely experiences self-esteem. Depending on the culture in which they live, various factors contribute to their self-esteem. People’s perceptions of themselves and their outlook on life are thus

recognised as a function of their culture and accepted as a characteristic of it. Western culture, for example, is typically regarded as individualistic and forward-looking, whereas Asian cultures are viewed as collectivist and retrospective. While this is generally true, it also compensates for stereotyping, which can prevent people from freely expressing themselves and discovering their way of life.

A Global Perspective on Self-Worth

Culture influences you through childhood stories, school values, and social norms. These factors shape your perception of happiness, anger, shame, guilt, and honour over time. In an individualistic culture, such as Western Europe or the United States, teenage romance is considered normal and an important part of growing up. However, in a culture like India, you are expected to prioritise your studies and family until the age of marriage. So, while it is normal for a teenager in the United States to be mocked for not having a romantic partner by the time they turn eighteen, having a partner may cause serious problems with their family for another teenager living in India.

Who am I? Self-Esteem Through the Lens of Culture

Due to these factors, culture serves as a framework for understanding oneself and one’s place in the world, which has a direct impact on one’s self-esteem and mental well-being. Your society assigns you a set of expectations and roles that you must fulfil. These are not always limiting, but they can feel like a constraint due to their generality. Here are some key factors

Emotional Expression: Emotions and how they are expressed are heavily influenced by gender in Asian cultures, with a few exceptions. While a woman’s anger is frowned upon, a man’s tears are viewed negatively. People are emotional regardless of gender. However, societal norms and stereotypes limit their free expression of emotions, causing mental health issues.

Communication Styles: Your culture influences your approach to communication and conflict resolution. How you perceive and resolve issues related to relationships, work, and finance has an impact on your emotional and social state.

Family and Community Support: Western cultures prioritise individual expression, but often lack social support systems. In Asian cultures, a death or tragedy is viewed as a shared burden, with family and friends joining in mourning and assisting with the grieving process. As a result, the society in which you live influences your sense of duty and

responsibility to others, as well as the support you come to expect from them.

Stigma and seeking support: Different cultures have unique stereotypes and stigmas. For many cultures, including Indian, mental health issues have long been associated with shame and status. This prevents one from seeking necessary assistance when needed, causing the problems to worsen. It is critical to identify and overcome the limiting aspects of one's culture, prioritising mental health over societal pressure.

Why Do Culturally Aware Mental Health Services Matter?

It is only natural that as you progress in life, you will become accustomed to and at times disagree with the culture in which you live. These situations should be handled with self-awareness and a strategic mindset. To generalise and label one culture progressive and the other regressive is a reductionist approach. It takes a critical approach to see the positive and negative aspects of one's culture and make decisions that prioritise one's mental health.

While doing so, the places you seek support from, including institutions, must be culturally sensitive. Culturally aware therapy is important in this context. A therapist who understands cultural differences and is open to the client's diversity is far more effective than one who follows the book and brings their own biases to the table. Cultural sensitisation is accompanied by genuine empathy, understanding, and open-mindedness.

The therapists at Hope Trust achieve the same results. Clients from all over the world receive online service that values their unique cultural experiences. Hope Trust's therapy techniques are adaptable and culturally sensitive. If you or a loved one is struggling with low self-esteem and a negative outlook on life, do not hesitate to seek help from a trained professional. You can entrust the experts at Hope Trust with your unique experiences and concerns, and embark on a new journey of self-care and love.

Click www.hopetrustindia.com for an online session with a therapist.